Introduction

Vision ■ Issues ■ Goals

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Purpose

IN JANUARY, 2003, LONG BEACH CITY Council voted unanimously to approve funding for the San Pedro Bay Estuary Project to contract with the 606 Design Studio at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona Department of Landscape Architecture. The purpose was to envision possibilities for an integrated open space and recreation network in the westside of Long Beach. *Long Beach RiverLink: Connecting City to River* provides a framework for the Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation, and Marine to connect the neighborhoods of the westside of Long Beach with the Los Angeles River. This project defines place, recognizes stakeholders, and develops a vision of an integrated open space and riverine network in the westside of Long Beach.

Vision

IMAGINE A LONG BEACH SPROUTING with activity, impromptu soccer matches taking shape in parks, and saplings breaking through the soil of what once were vacant, debris-laden fields. The dense urban fabric gives way to show the patches of nature that once existed, each patch creating shaded pockets for weary strollers and children resting on the walk home from school. Imagine a Long Beach where people can step out of their houses and follow tree-lined pathways full of singing birds, to a revitalized river park full of playful children, parents and families, couples sitting on hills looking out across the water. A different path may lead to a fruitful community market in a restored building, once forgotten but now used again. This is the Long Beach that can grow out of a vision for a greenway along the Los Angeles River and the disconnected parcels of land at its edge. The edge of the river becomes the most active area, the point where human cultures mesh with natural systems. It is where the city meets the river, where people and parks come together, and where residents become active in their communities. This is the point of revitalization, both for the city and for the river.

Long Beach was founded in 1888, by citizens of the former Willmore City and quickly grew in population because of the shipping industry and the scenic environment. Floodwaters from the unpredictable Los Angeles River silted in the ports and the decision was made to relocate the river to a flood control channel east of the ports. Oil was discovered in the 1920s and this became the major industry in Long Beach for much of the rest of the century. In the late 1930s, floods again caused heavy damage to Long Beach and other cities along the river and as a result, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a concrete channel to provided added protection. The Navy moved onto Terminal Island in the 1940s and the aircraft industry expanded the economic base of the city. There has always been a close relationship between the neighborhoods and industry; oil pumps and other infrastructure are in plain sight throughout the city.

As described by its residents, Long Beach is a city of neighborhoods, a “big-little city” compared to other cities. People take pride in the beautiful beaches, the arts community, and the overall sense of place in Long Beach that separates it from many other cities in the Los Angeles region. The city has a colorful history; people come alive when discussing it. These stories are showcased throughout the city in the architecture of downtown hotels and individual houses. The industries and influences that caused Long Beach to boom are still evident in many areas and can be seen from great distances. Geographically, Long Beach is significant because it sits directly between the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River basins. These rivers are the features of the city that are the most forgotten. Many people are not aware of the importance of these waterways and see them as concrete water corridors, an accurate but unbecoming description of such significant features.

The Los Angeles River lives in the back of people’s minds, far from their everyday thoughts. Because it is so forlorn, alone in its concrete cradle, the river has become difficult to experience. Physically, there are few roads that lead directly to the river, and few access points for the bike path that runs along the top of the channel. The community has not thought of the river, until recently, as an amenity or park system. People had no reason to go to the river because it was perceived as having very little value. There is little connection between the city and the remnant natural system’s and the river’s native vegetation. Wildlife and some remnants of nature exist along the river in fragmented pieces, but do not spread into the city. When people do not feel physical, social or environmental connections to a place, then that place becomes forgotten about and lost in the culture.

The river has been lost to the people of Long Beach. The image of the river and its long cultural connection to the city is not clear. The river is no longer a part of the stories people tell about Long Beach. Civic pride does not include the river and most people tend to ignore its features.

Long Beach residents are generally active in their communities. The North Long Beach Project Action Committee is involved in the redevelopment efforts in that part of town. Other groups have begun to take the initiative to bring their input to the table. However, many obstacles stand in their way. Typical planning processes have not been modeled intensively towards community

involvement. There has often been a gap between the community and the development of planning and design solutions.

The vision of revitalization may be difficult to imagine in the present day Long Beach, but the westside of Long Beach is full of great neighborhoods, parks, and people; great features that exist as separate entities begging to be knitted together into a cohesive urban fabric.

Location

THE RIVERLINK STUDY AREA IS GENERALLY defined as the westside of Long Beach, California, which stretches the entire length of the Los Angeles River as it flows through the city, from the eastern bank of the channel to Redondo Avenue. The westside of Long Beach is comprised of Council Districts One, Two, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine.

Within the individual council districts, there are many neighborhoods that begin to weave together the cultural fabric of Long Beach, which is described by residents as a "city of neighborhoods" (Long Beach City Council, 2001).

Key Issues

THIS STUDY IDENTIFIES A NUMBER OF issues facing the westside of Long Beach that can be addressed through creative planning and design. The most significant of these issues include:

- ***Inadequate Parks and Recreational Activities Based on Population*** – The population of the westside of Long Beach is considerably denser than the rest of Long Beach, however it has notably fewer parks and recreational opportunities for its residents. Additionally, schools, facing overcrowding, desire outdoor classrooms and environmental education programs.

- ***Lack of Strong Community Identity*** – The neighborhoods of the westside of Long Beach have many great assets and a strong cultural heritage, which is not adequately revealed and celebrated within the urban fabric. This results in a weak community identity and an undefined image of the westside of Long Beach.

- ***Severed Connections to Downtown Long Beach*** – The removal of the historic trolley lines, coupled with the loss of shopping nodes, downtown parking, and the channelization of the river, have created a physical disconnection between many residents of the westside of Long Beach and the downtown economic and cultural centers. The lack of an integrated signage and wayfinding system directing people to downtown Long Beach creates disorientation among pedestrians and motorists.

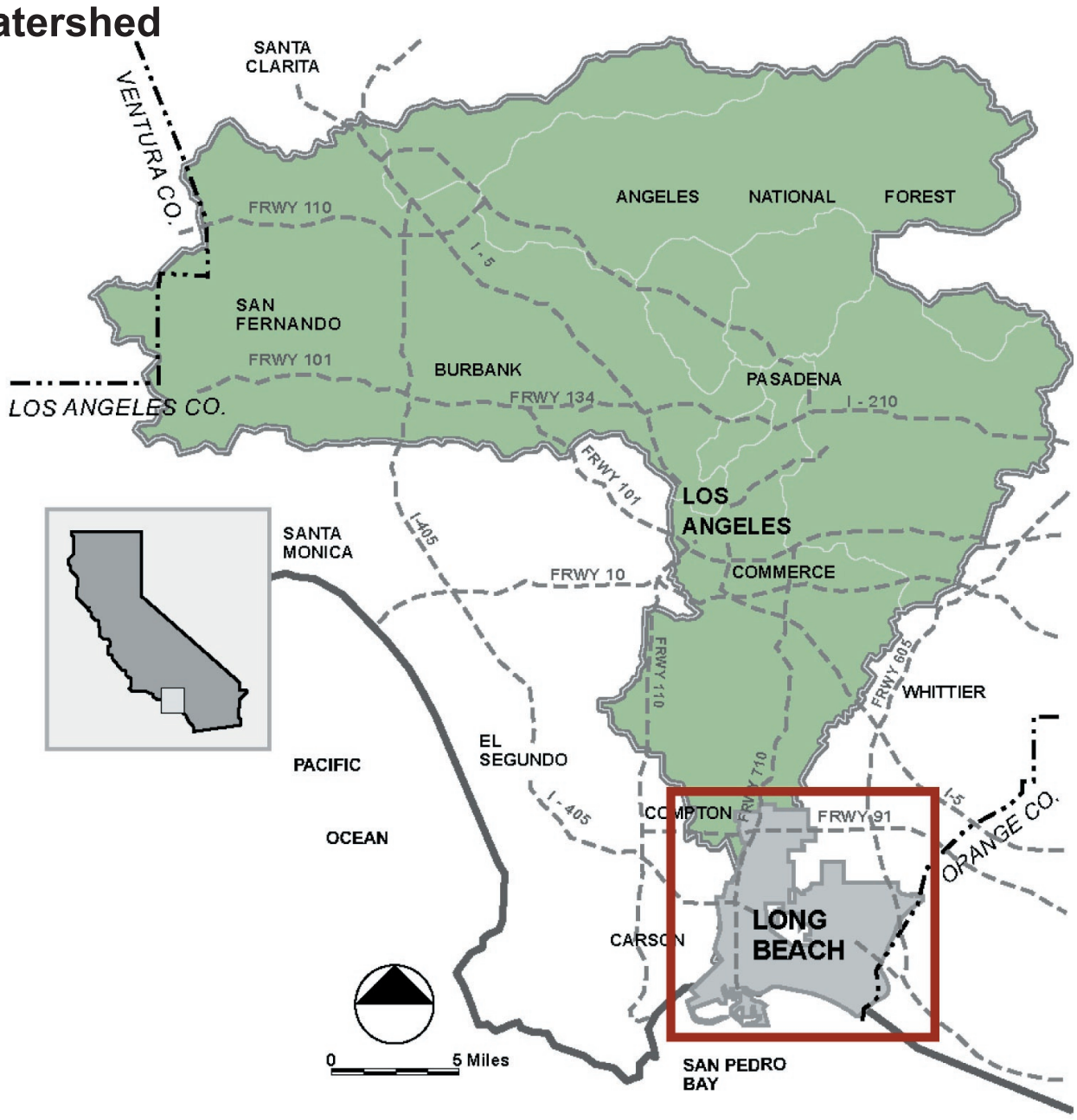
- ***Severed Connections between Neighborhoods of the westside of Long Beach and the Los Angeles River*** – The channelization of the river created large, inaccessible berms along the channel making it difficult for people to experience the Los Angeles River. The lack of an integrated signage and wayfinding system directing people to the river creates disorientation among pedestrians and motorists. Furthermore, the westside of Long Beach residents are disconnected from the history of the Los Angeles River and its relationship with their city.

- ***Lack of Urban Nature in the westside of Long Beach*** – The dense urban fabric of the westside of Long Beach has precluded the conservation of viable urban habitat areas, degrading the natural heritage of Long Beach. This has created a disconnection between the westside of Long Beach residents and the natural environment.

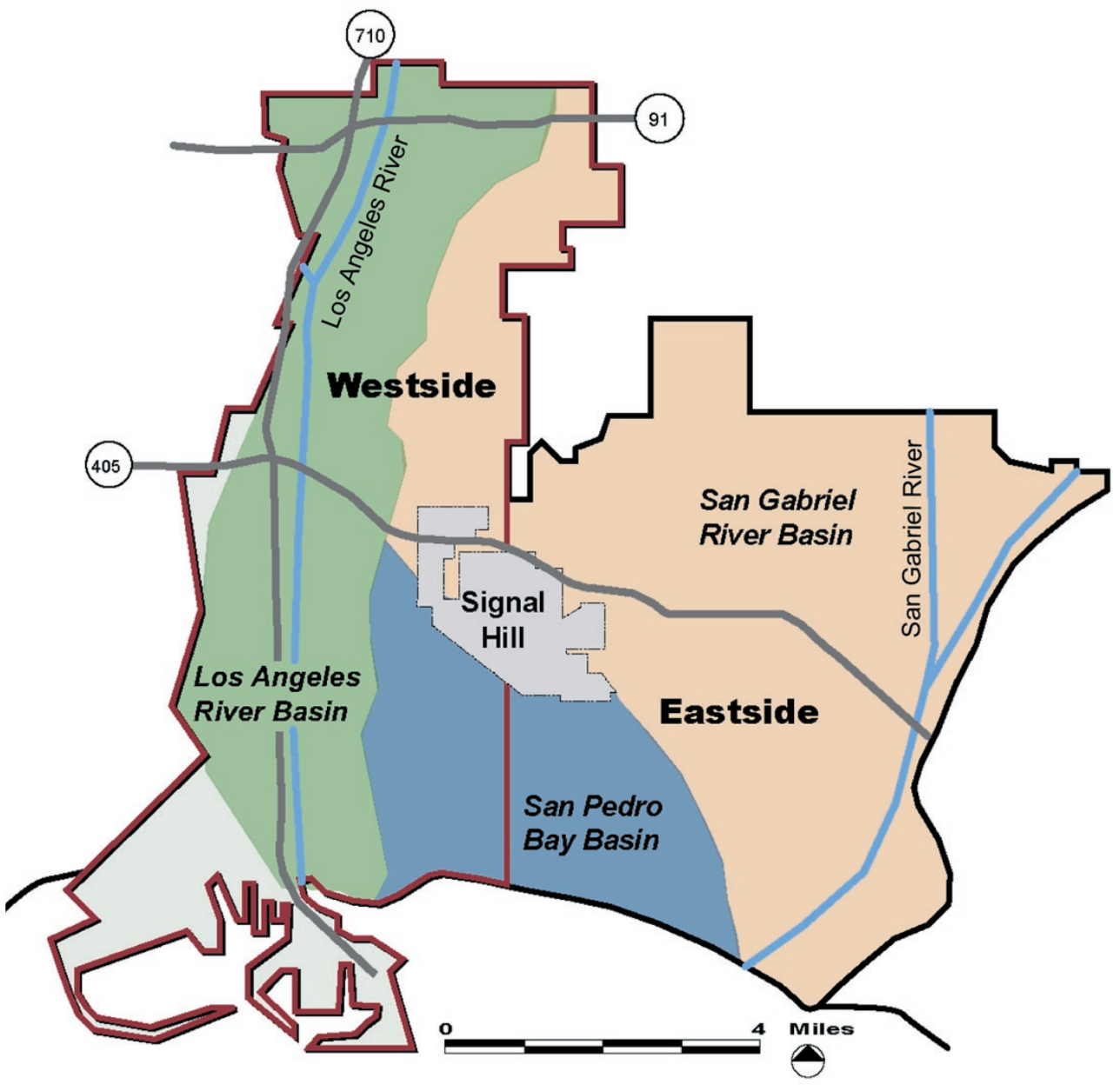
- ***Safe and Universal Access to Public Spaces*** – Safety in parks was identified as a major concern for the community. Additionally, those with disabilities have a difficult time maneuvering along sidewalks and parks in the westside of Long Beach and to the Los Angeles River.

- ***Pollution from Industrial Activities and Transportation*** – Oil development and other industrial and economic endeavors have resulted in real or perceived contamination problems along the Los Angles River and in various sites throughout the westside of Long Beach. In addition, vehicular traffic and other industrial activities have contributed to local air quality problems.

Los Angeles River Watershed



Long Beach, California



Goals and Objectives

IN LIGHT OF KEY ISSUES FACING THE westside, the design team generated goals to direct planning and design efforts. Each goal is supported by a number of objectives to guide the successful achievement of the goal.

Goal 1:
Reconnect the neighborhoods of the westside to the Los Angeles River and its natural and cultural heritage.

Objectives:

- Identify barriers to river access and propose solutions to overcoming them in a way that encourages universal access, walking, bicycling, and mass transit use.
- Integrate multiple modes of transportation into a unified system between the neighborhoods of the westside of Long Beach and the Los Angels River.
- Enhance the image of the westside of Long Beach and connect with local attractions such as the Los Angeles River, the Aquarium of the Pacific, and downtown Long Beach.
- Reveal the cultural heritage of westside of Long Beach neighborhoods throughout the RiverLink system.

Goal 2:
Increase and enhance the amount of safe, accessible, public parklands, and open space in the westside of Long Beach.

Objectives:

- Identify potential park sites adjacent to the Los Angeles River and propose strategies for integrating them into an open space network and greenway system connecting neighborhoods, schools, parks, and shopping, with the Los Angeles River.
- Propose strategies for connecting open space throughout the region.
- Propose creative strategies to redefine open space in order to increase the total amount of open space in Long Beach.
- Enhance the urban nature of the westside of Long Beach, connecting people to the natural environment through the creation of urban habitats and demonstrations.
- Mitigate the urban heat island effect as well as pollution from vehicular transportation.
- Propose strategies for the adaptive reuse of existing sites and infrastructure as well as strategies mitigating site pollution using native vegetation and coordinating with city remediation efforts.
- Provide opportunities for outdoor education, integrating classrooms with the natural environment.
- Provide opportunities for outdoor recreation integrated with neighborhood open spaces.

Goal 3:
Promote citizen participation in the public process for open space planning, development, and stewardship.

Objectives:

- Formulate a place-based planning framework that will assist in the development of a community vision for the RiverLink project and will promote citizen participation in all stages of the process.
- Organize outreach meetings to gather input from the community regarding potential parks and open space, transportation methods, safety issues, and the cultural image of the westside of Long Beach and the Los Angeles River.
- Create a legacy of public participation in the planning process for the City of Long Beach to utilize in the future.

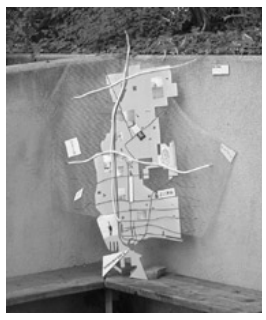
Through the design process, these goals and objectives became synthesized criteria upon which the design team evaluated its proposed design strategies, based on the appropriate scale.

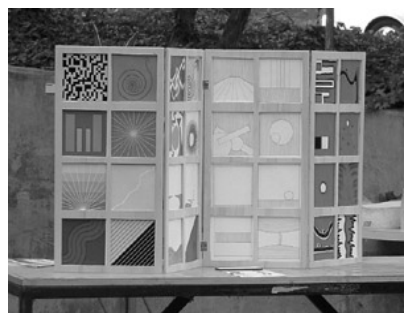
Methods

THE RIVERLINK PROJECT IMPLEMENTS the design method outlined by John T. Lyle in his seminal book, *Design for Human Ecosystems* (1999). This method is an ecological design process that integrates both cultural and ecological influences of the landscape.

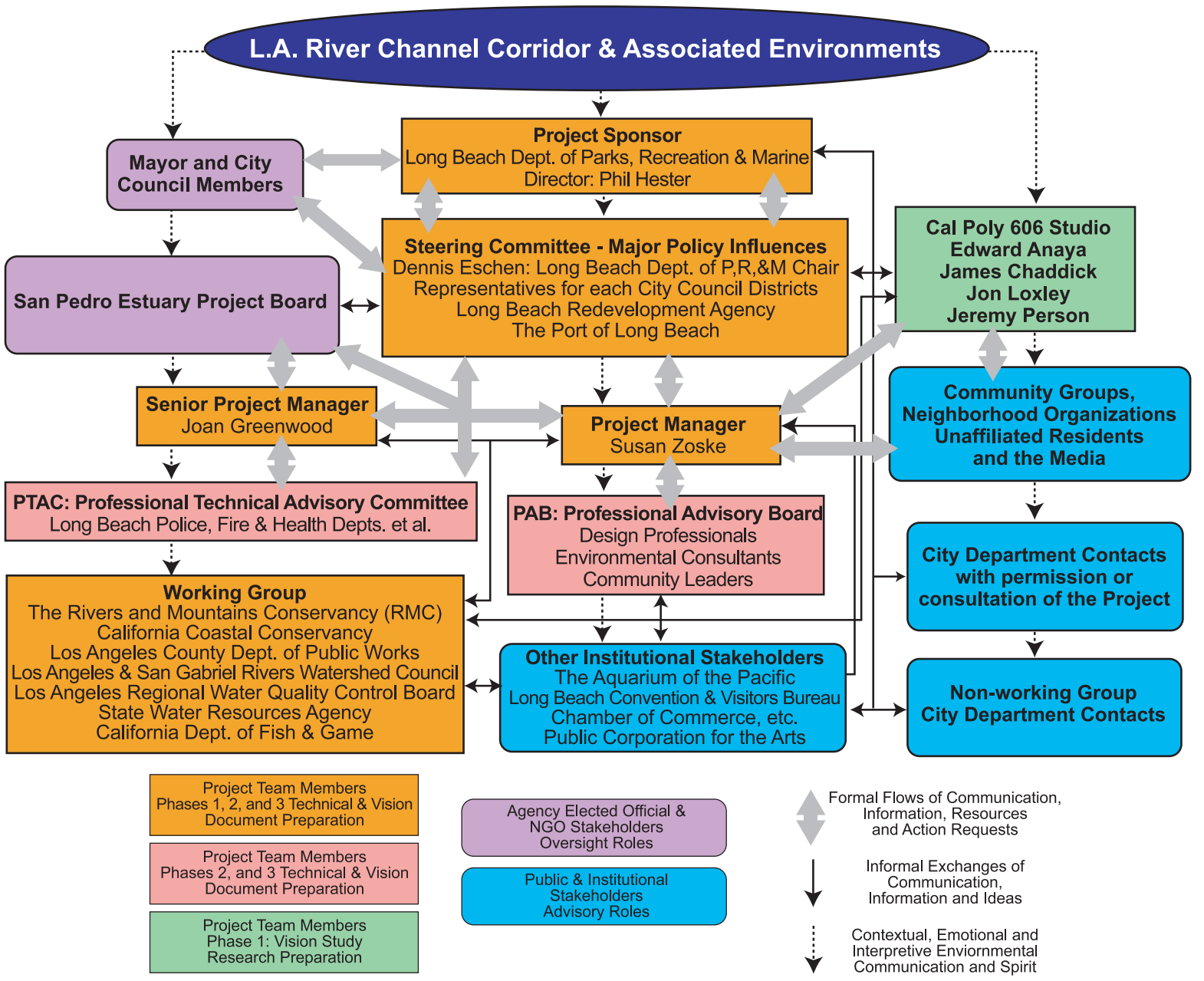
Ecosystematic Design

The 606 Studio process is based on Alfred North Whitehead's stages of learning and is divided into three stages: romance, precision, and generalization, which are described below. The RiverLink team went through these stages, but in addition, researched other methods and case studies to help understand the complex issues facing Long Beach's reconnection to the Los Angeles River.





Stage of Romance
Art Expressions



RiverLink Stakeholders Chart

In the stage of romance, the RiverLink design team became immersed in the urban fabric of Long Beach, in order to develop impressions of the city and its relation to the Los Angeles River. Taking inspiration from our visits and resulting impressions, each member of the design team created an art expression that reflected their feelings and impressions of the project. This assisted in the development of the key issues. There was also a collaborative work to help guide toward the team philosophy for the project of making connections and following a pathway to our destination.

During the stage of precision, the design team conducted many community meetings and outreach sessions. Extensive meetings were conducted with our clients, city staff members, interested stakeholders, and other professionals. Because of the highly urbanized nature of Long Beach and the proximity of the residents to the various sites under consideration, it became clear early on that there was a lack of understanding of the cultural relationship between the westside of Long Beach and the Los Angeles River, and of the potential for natural restoration of this urban environment. Research was conducted into what had occurred historically in terms of culture and ecology along the Los Angeles River. Political and jurisdictional considerations were also studied, so a clear vision could be derived within the constraints of the various stakeholder needs and requirements.

As part of the final stage, known as the stage of generalization, the design team compiled the base knowledge from the sites, the desires and needs of the community, and the directives from institutional stakeholders, to outline the issues involved in such a complex undertaking. From these issues, the RiverLink design team reinforced and further developed the project goals and objetives. From this came strategies to reconnect the westside of Long Beach of Long Beach to the Los Angeles River, incorporating specific design solutions for the spotlighted areas.

The Lyle method conducted by the RiverLink design team during the 606 Studio process was enhanced with the principles of the place-based planning method. Additionally, the design team researched case studies, imageability and wayfinding, urban nature, urban forestry, and thematic design. This adaptive use of methods and research was synthesized in order to create an approachable and unified vision of connectivity for the RiverLink system.

Place-Based Planning

Within John Lyle's ecosystematic design framework, the design team employed the place-based planning principles outlined by the Project for Public Spaces to help engage the community and bring their interests to the forefront of the planning process. "Place-based planning and design... supports an integrated approach to community and environmental planning that [is] both holistic and interdisciplinary." (NRC, 2001, p.1)

It is important in placed-based planning and design to make sure all stakeholders are given an opportunity to suggest, advise, and oversee, in a dialogue with the expert and professional people

involved in the planning and design work. All placed-based activities and efforts from educational programs to vegetation management must be developed to complement and demonstrate qualities of place. This becomes even more paramount in parklands and open space planning and design because of all the competing needs for ever-decreasing available open space.

As the community and stakeholders are shown that they can be effective in a proactive shaping of the places they have connections to, then commitment and stewardship grow because a sense of ownership is fostered and nurtured by the process.

A place-based planning framework encourages a number of actions:

- Definition of place
- Stakeholder identification
- Development of a vision statement or vision of place
- Development of stakeholder and expert roles
- Project implementation and execution
- Project review, re-evaluation, and contingency strategies
- Development of a succession strategy or method allowing future generations to adapt the vision to fit ever-changing needs

This document will address the first three actions and lay the groundwork for the development of stakeholder and expert roles, as well as project implementation, evaluation, and establishment of succession strategies.

The use of the placed-based planning framework allowed community input at the early stages of the project, as well as at other points in the process. Community outreach meetings were held ten times during the project. Additionally, the design team attended numerous neighborhood association meetings. This method is recommended for use in future planning initiatives related to parks and open space development in order to achieve favorable resident acceptance at community meetings. ■